



Uruguay

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 68,039 square miles, and its population is estimated at 3.2 million. While the Government keeps no statistics concerning religious affiliation, an October 2004 academic survey published in the daily newspaper *El Pais* reported that 54 percent of those surveyed designated themselves as Roman Catholics, 6.3 percent as evangelical Protestants, 5 percent as Protestants, 9 percent as believers without a religious affiliation, and 26 percent as nonbelievers. The mainline Protestant minority is composed primarily of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other denominations and branches include evangelicals, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Eastern Orthodox, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) claims 85,000 members. There are approximately 30,000 Jews, who support 15 synagogues.

The Unification Church is active in the country and has major property holdings. There also is a Muslim population that lives primarily near the border with Brazil. The estimated 4,000 Baha'is are concentrated primarily in Montevideo.

Many Christian groups perform foreign missionary work. For example, there are an estimated 360 Mormon missionaries in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on religion.

There is strict separation of church and state. All religious groups are entitled to tax exemptions on their houses of worship, and there were no reports of difficulties in receiving these exemptions. To receive the tax exemptions, a religious group must register as a nonprofit entity and draft organizing statutes. It then applies to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examines the legal entity and grants religious status. The group must reapply every 5 years. Once the ministry grants religious status, the church can request an exemption each year from the taxing body, which is usually the municipal government.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students who belong to minority religions to miss school for religious holidays without penalty. There are private religious schools, which are mainly Catholic and Jewish.

The holy days of Three Kings Day, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as official national holidays.

The Penal Code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The House of Deputies' Constitutional

Legislative Affairs Commission revised the code to broaden the definition of hate crimes, thereby making it easier for police to classify certain offenses as hate crimes and to provide the judicial system with the tools necessary to sentence violators to jail. In September 2004, Law 17.817, which specifically penalizes acts of xenophobia and other types of discrimination, went into effect.

Foreign missionaries face no special requirements or restrictions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Christian-Jewish Council meets regularly to promote interfaith understanding. In addition, the mainstream Protestant denominations meet regularly among themselves and with the Roman Catholic Church. There are several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promote interfaith understanding.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy representatives met with human rights and religious NGOs, including B'nai B'rith and the Israeli Central Committee of Uruguay. They also met with the leaders of religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Islamic community, and Mormon and Protestant groups.

The Embassy maintains frequent contact with religious and nonreligious organizations that are involved in the protection of human rights, such as Mundo Afro, which represents the interests of citizens of African descent.

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